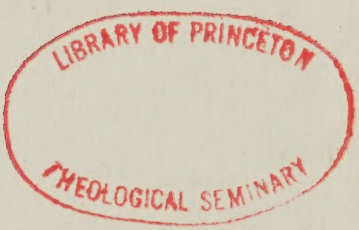

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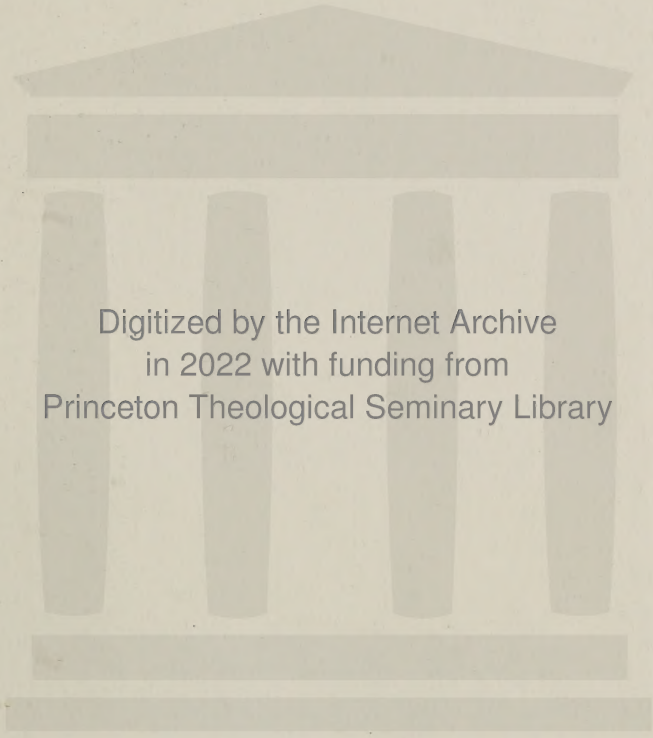
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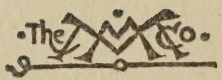

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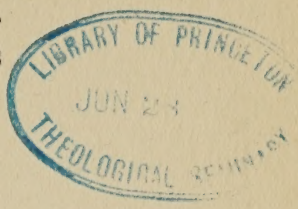
TWO DAYS BEFORE

SIMPLE THOUGHTS ABOUT
OUR LORD ON THE CROSS



BY

THE REV. H. R. L. SHEPPARD

VICAR OF ST. MARTIN-IN-THE-FIELDS AND
HON. CHAPLAIN TO H.M. THE KING

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FOREWORD

These addresses, which make no claim whatsoever to originality, were written on board s.s. *Berengaria* during a particularly rough passage from America. They are printed practically as they were spoken and are published at the request of some who heard them. The pressure of work has made it impossible for the addresses to be either re-written or revised.

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O Heavenly Father, forasmuch as none can come to receive Thy Holy Word except Thou draw them by Thy gracious power, we beseech Thee to pour out Thy Holy Spirit upon us, that our hearts may be inclined favourably to receive, steadfastly to retain and obediently to perform, whatsoever we may learn from the Words on the Cross, so that we set forth in our lives what we owe to Thy redeeming love, Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

CHAPTER I

The Way of the Cross

CHAPTER I

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

It is with a truly wonderful restraint that the writers of the Gospel tell the story of our dear Lord's Passion.

They feel, I think, that it needs no embellishment to make it real and impressive. Perhaps they gloried in it too much to fill their tale with the expression of their own sorrow. There are no "ahs" and "ohs" such as fill some of our devotional books that tell about the Passion; they give us just a plain, straight recital of all that their Master suffered on His way to the Resurrection. In the Gospel story there are few adjectives, no compliments, no flattery. It is something of this strange restraint, awe and dignity that I would so like to recapture. We will not endanger one scene that is compelling and impressive by lashing ourselves into emotion. We will not sentimentalise the Cross. Too often Good Friday has been for many of us but the recital of the physical sufferings of Jesus. It has been a yearly spectacle of something that was very revolting. We who take part in the spectacle are very sorry about it: we smite our breasts as the men of old and vow that it was all very monstrous, and go back to the City, and there is an end.

I can neither understand nor bear those easily

thrown-off phrases about the Blood of Jesus; for instance the words of a hymn that is often sung,

> "So may the blood from out His side
> Fall gently on us drop by drop,"

seem to me revolting and entirely meaningless.

Neville Talbot says something that is well worth attention about this phraseology on the Blood of Jesus: "Doubtless this imagery of the precious Blood of Christ is as a casket containing a treasure. But unless the casket be opened, the imagery interpreted, the treasure will lie hidden from many by that which is repulsive to them."

No word written or spoken can really help unless we understand what the Cross and the Words from it mean for us, our world and our home. I have known so many who by their own efforts have been born again on Good Friday.

There is much darkness still around the Cross. It is hard for men to see it as it actually is, lit up now by the light of Easter Day. Jesus is nearer to us than ever before, but His Cross is farther away, but Jesus without His Cross is adorable indeed, but not powerful to save.

Jesus is nearer than ever. We know Him in a sense in which He has never been known before. We know all about His humanity. Modern scholarship has brought Him across to us. Books about His human life pour out from the press, and they are not only bought but read. But the moment after Jesus comes alongside of us, He goes ahead to a Cross, and later to a Resurrection, and here it is hard to follow and many turn back.

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

The Cross has been preached to us so as either to mystify or revolt; there was a preacher who said—or was it in a book that we read it?—that God being angry caused His Son to die to satisfy His fury; and did we not once read somewhere that God is more favourably disposed towards us now because Jesus died in agony? Perhaps that wasn't what was written or said, but it is how we read and understood it. Anyhow, when we weren't revolted we were mystified.

The Cross of Christ, when it is understood, is our glory, but it needs rescuing from the mist that is around it. The Cross was never meant to be so mystified and intellectualised as to be unintelligible to simple folks. There is mystery, but there is enough light shed from the Cross for simple people to walk in and rejoice.

Let me say one or two of the simplest things.

First of all, the good news of the Cross is not merely about Jesus, it is about God. The Cross is set up once and for all, so that we may see in terms of love just how God loves the world. He got His whole heart out on it.

Then it was set up so that we might see the hell that sin causes. If you see the one who to you is most lovable in the whole world in agonies because of what you have done, your heart is broken with a sorrow that leads to a changed life. I have known a lad in prison unrepentant until he saw the suffering and agony that his sin caused his mother. It was crucified love that broke his heart, while the moral teaching of the prison chaplain had failed. At the Cross a million men have said,

"Father, forgive, until now I never knew what I was doing." The Cross is more like God than anything He ever did, and in seeing Jesus we see God. It is God's appeal to the best in man. Jesus headed a movement of men up to God when He set forth the love that was glad to suffer for its own.

But the Cross still stands and men know in their hearts that it alone can lift humanity. If any of us think we have anything to contribute to human welfare without a share of suffering we are just living in a fool's paradise, which is no paradise at all. We learn that hard lesson at Calvary.

I know one thing for certain—because of the Cross I can love God, and more than that, because of the Cross I can be a better man.

If you can, will you make a prayer that the Risen Christ may show you why He chose the Cross, and why it behoves us, too, to suffer if the Kingdom of God is to come upon the earth, and why we may indeed glory in asking for a share in His suffering?

CHAPTER II

"FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO."

CHAPTER II

The tragedy of the Crucifixion begins with as noble a prayer as was ever breathed. The first word spoken from the Cross is the last word in wisdom for the days in which we live. Had we been passing near enough to Calvary to catch that prayer offered by a dying man we should have been obliged to stop and hear more.

We are perfectly capable of recognising what is Godlike. Here is a morality that has never been surpassed.

Christianity has only one legitimate weapon, though it uses many. It is to conquer the world by loving it and in no other way. The moment its followers begin to take part in the conflict—beloved of Churches and Nations—as to who shall be the greatest they are on the way to the denial of Christ.

Almighty is the word we most frequently attach to God, and by it we suggest to ourselves that God can do whatever He pleases whenever He chooses. Out of that came the passionate question still re-echoing, "Why did not God stop the War?" The power of God, if Jesus Christ is to be believed, is only of that kind which is able to do whatever love can do. Love in the end is unconquerable—all-mighty. You can crucify it, but it will rise again. On Calvary the whole heart of God is seen. He

went on loving all the time, especially when it hurt badly.

Were I in the presence of men and women who had never heard of Jesus Christ, I can imagine no greater appeal than to tell them that, when He Whom we call Lord and Master was nailed to a Cross, He began an agony of three hours by asking that those who had nailed Him there might be forgiven—and more, by suggesting to God, Whom He called Father, that there *was* a reason for forgiveness. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Men would listen after that. Moral values never wholly foresworn would suggest that this man should be given a hearing.

You will sometimes see a crowd gather round a speaker to hear his first word. If it appeals they will remain for more. We must all feel grateful that the first word we are allowed to repeat as we point the way to Christ crucified is as arresting as this, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Not in the lecture-room, or in the pulpit is forgiveness here preached, but by a man in agony, more cruelly wronged and as dreadfully hurt as any who was ever done to death in France or Belgium or the world over. There was a crown of thorns on His head, nails tearing His flesh, and a crowd of sight-seers making sport below. The kiss of Judas must have been smarting still, and, worst of all, there was the agony in His Mother's upturned face. At this moment He preached forgiveness and found a reason why those who hated Him and hurt His Mother might be forgiven.

In all honesty, I cannot see how nations and

peoples, professedly Christian, can continue their enmities in the face of this first word spoken by the Ideal to which they aspire and Whose teaching they profess to accept. I think it might be easily proved that in this, as in every respect, Christianity is also common-sense.

The Dean of Durham has lately said that there are certain people we can never forgive. Conceivably that attitude is possible for those who are not prepared to accept the tenets of Christianity. From the lips of a man who daily prays "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us" it is a truly dreadful utterance. It is desperately hard to forgive some people some things, but a Christian exists to attempt what the world considers impossible. Left to ourselves we should much prefer to give a general forgiveness all round, exempting one or two who are really the 'limit' as if our dear Lord had prayed, "Father, forgive everybody except Judas and the man who plaited the crown of thorns, and the man who drove in the nails." It is indeed hard to forgive everyone who has trespassed against ours and us; it may take months of praying for a larger measure of love before we can place their names on our list of intercessions, but to determine that it can never, shall never, and ought never to be done, is as disastrous to the soul of a Christian as it is to the world in which he lives.

Perhaps our acutest trouble lies in our refusal to realise how hard it is to be a Christian. We are always asking for crowns and chief seats in the Kingdom without a thought of the crusade that comes first. Comfort and consolation, but no battlefield;

that is our demand on our religion. The light-hearted prayer for a front seat up above is so easily tossed up to the Throne of God, but there is a cup first to be drained, and it is often bitter drinking and seldom of our choosing. Christianity does not consist in abstaining from things that no gentleman would think of doing, but in doing things that are unlikely to occur to anyone who is not in touch with the Spirit of Christ.

The sin of separation is perhaps the most harmful of all the mean evils that stalk the world. Many of us keep it alive. We hug our hatreds to our breast, and nourish them while they prey on the hearts of men. The situation is complicated because so often we think we have forgiven—we are proud of our magnanimity—yet we have not forgiven in Christ's sense at all, all the while there is a mental reservation that never again can we be friends; it shall not be the same as it was. We have never discovered any excuse for forgiving our enemies, except that we are so generous.

There is no juggling to be done with our Lord's words about forgiveness. It has got to be of that kind that would desire to share Paradise with a criminal—seventy times seven is the minimum that must be measured to him who has offended. That is difficult; how well I know it. There is one man whom I am struggling hard to forgive, but only in a formal way as yet have I forgiven. I know I cannot be truly a disciple until I have done better than this. Also I know that "He who cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself." He that hateth his brother is in the darkness and

walketh in the darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth because the darkness hath blinded his eyes. He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is Love. He that abideth in love abideth in God and God abideth in him.

And there is a further consideration: I wonder sometimes whether we do not owe more than we realise to those who have hurt us. At least they have warned us of the pain that hatred and cruelty can inflict. The people whom the world accounts criminals have saved many another from crime, because they have heard or read the whole brutal tale of the hell that has been brought to those who love them.

Only lately a man and a woman on the scaffold paid to the community the penalty of their crime—a poem was written about them:

Then came a day:—
Judged and condemned, enduring without hope,—
I heard how, near at hand, two prisoners lay
In separate cells, each waiting for the rope:
Fearful of that whose touch would put away
All griefs and fears.
And helpless I, to aid
Their hapless state,—
Lighten, or lift from them that stroke of fate,—
With heartfelt tears,
For them, poor souls, I prayed,
That them from utter wreck
Some Help might save!

Then to my heart
There came a rending wave:
Across my neck
A sudden rope was flung;

TWO DAYS BEFORE

Up went a light,
And I, of land, had sight,—
Where, dark against the sky, two murderers clung,
And in the baffling storm, hand over hand,
Hauled on the line
Which drew my feet to land!

Lord, in Thy Kingdom's day, remember them,
Whate'er they did, who helped me, in my need,
To touch Thy raiment's hem!

Is it far-fetched to suggest that there are reasons for being grateful even to those who by their sin have held up before us the most vivid picture of the last act of hatred?

Well might this great question of Christian forgiveness engage the attention of the statesmen of the world. The Treaty of Versailles has failed, as some said it would at the time, because there was no chair left vacant around the Conference table for the Peacemaker. The darkness of separation has fallen on many of the hopes of universal peace that clutched at the heart of humanity in November of 1918. It is hard for men to-day not to live in the Saturday which came between Good Friday and Easter morning. Everywhere the nations growl like sullen dogs on fragile chains, there is little trust and no Christian forgiveness. Europe looks as if it needs must re-group itself for another universal massacre. If we have lifted the cloud of our hatred from one nation, it is only to remove it to another. One would have thought that the so-called statesmen of the world would have come to realise by now that there can be no hope until each nation takes more than its

own self-interest to the Council Chamber, until, indeed, it is willing to forgive with that full forgiveness that brings comradeship and the confidence and laughter that a friend shares with a friend. It is hard to see how the clouds can ever be dispelled until humanity stands bare-headed beneath the Cross of its Redeemer and hears Him cry, " Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

It is hard for us to make that prayer our own, for the nails are still piercing hands that are human, and the sweat of agony is still moist on men's brows; suffering, loneliness and poverty do not make easily for forgiveness. It is not a prayer that is likely to be said with eyes looking across the Channel, the North Sea, or to where men and women live in indulgence and ostentation, while half the world is in want, unless it is preceded by a prayer for a larger measure of the love that was in Jesus Christ. It is harder still, maybe, to re-echo the first cry from the Cross while we think of some of those who live close to our daily life who have hurt us, only we cannot bring any gift to the Cross, or to the Altar on Easter Day, unless we first be reconciled to our brother.

" Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." They did not really—they did not mean to crucify actually; they meant to hurt but not so successfully. In a sense, like the Roman soldiers, they were only doing what they were told to do. The whisper went round that we were going to strike and they struck first. Perhaps, even, they thought they were doing God's Will; it would not be the first time that man has hitched his own

ambitions to the car of some kind of Jehovah, and imagined he was following God's Will.

Take the case of a friend and neighbour from whom we have long since parted company—after all it may be that the act that brought about the separation has long since been regretted. Little we know the full story of the worry and provocation that lay behind it. It was done in a moment of heat and anger and at a time when nerves were strained beyond endurance. It was never meant to wound and cut down the years like this; also, it does take two to make a quarrel, and even our best friend would be obliged to admit that at times we are dreadfully difficult and irritating. If we and they could see in one ghastly nightmare of reality the poison that spreads from a wrong that is unforgotten and unforgiven we should not think it weak and feeble to speak from our side the first word of forgiveness. It were better to accept an unfair share of the blame than to suffer the sin of separation to continue.

It was a weak thing before our Lord's day to forgive an enemy, and foolishly weak to allow that there had ever been circumstances that could excuse his offence. The world has not changed very much since His day, and the rate of its progress in peace-making compels us to believe that there is room for a little company who will try and take their Lord and Master seriously. God's fools let us call them, if we wish. We shall go on bumping from one catastrophe to another until Christ's Royal Way of loving men into penitence is attempted, and His way suggests that those who have been injured, cruelly and unjustly injured, should make the effort

to forget their own wounds—their own offended dignity—their own loss of status and prestige, and should pray for those who have hurt them as they hope Christ will pray for them, " Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

CHAPTER III

"LORD, REMEMBER ME WHEN THOU COMEST INTO THY KINGDOM."

"VERILY, I SAY UNTO THEE, TO-DAY SHALT THOU BE WITH ME IN PARADISE."

CHAPTER III

HERE we touch mystery: here it is that many turn away from the Cross, for it is difficult for us to believe that this Second Word is more than a little kindly attention offered by one dying man to another. Had it been so, it would not have lived as it has in the hearts of men. The Christian dares to believe that this is the heart and power of God getting itself across in the only way that can win a free response. The kind of God that man demands is one Who would dare the agony of Hell to save His own, not because He pitied but because He cared. There is more than one Cross on Calvary, and it is the Cross on one side in the shadow that reflects the glory of the Son of God.

The good news of the Gospel is more than the biography of a Lovely Man. It is the demonstration of what God is like. Forget that and the day becomes *bad* and not *Good* Friday, and there remains little to be done but shed a tear or two for a dear departed hero who never made good.

We love Him because He first loved us; otherwise, I do not think we could have loved. He came to us and now we want to come to Him. Ignorance of God, not sin alone, once kept us away. The reports of His character that came from prophet and priest were not satisfactory; they did not answer to our heart's yearning. There was a darkness around

God felt most keenly by those who were incurably religious. What is His character? That is what really matters. "Padre, what is God like? It is your job to know," was only the War-time way of putting the age-long question. In answer we point, not to a single crucifix, but to one cross alongside of two others on which God has chosen to be nailed so that He might be actually alongside of them in the direst hour of their suffering, should He be needed. Love cannot go further than this. I know no truer picture of God than this, and none so compelling.

There is an old story of a man who died and is supposed to have gone into the darkness of Hell. There came to the guardian of that dread place first his brother who asked if he might send him in a cup of water. Then his friends and relations who begged for his release, and last of all, his mother, who the moment the gate was opened rushed in that she might be with him in Hell. If we can begin to understand that, we shall not look in vain at the dying thief on Calvary. Man is not saved because he reaches up to the truth, but because the Way, the Life and the Truth reach down to him, so that he can recognise perfection.

The story of that dying man is as the story of the world; in the main it has been the old, old tale of a great refusal. God had done His best from afar to win the free love of men, but there had been a check. That offer was re-made more powerfully still by Jesus in the sunny days of His ministry, but in the main again He failed—thwarted by sin, yes, but also by a perfectly tragic conception of the

character of God. Sin and darkness were in between God and His children, sometimes because they would not listen to the still small voice—sometimes because they preferred to stand outside the Kingdom than to be the servant of a King Who looked so much like a tyrant. To put this right not even the Ministry of Jesus was effective. We empty the Gospel of a great deal of its meaning if we discount the expressions of disappointment that burst so often from the lips of our Lord. Here, then, was a crisis.

Once more there was a check and a failure. A few were ready for the Word of God, but only a few. Something more was necessary, that is, if love could do anything more. For the world, like the penitent thief, was on the Cross in agony, and there was darkness over the face of the earth and sorrow in the heart of God, and then happened the last and greatest device of love—God and His Son conspired to come out of the darkness into the light. Our Lord got on the Cross alongside of men. If they suffered, so would He. All the fury of the world should burst over Him. Was man dying deserted? then He would, too. Surely if once men were to see what sin cost God, if once He could get His heart right out before them, they would turn homeward in sorrow and in gratitude.

I would I could make this more real to you. I wish the penitent thief could tell you himself the whole story, and yet I think I can do as well, for there are doubtless many acts in my own life that have brought me into even greater condemnation. We, too, know how God in Jesus Christ does come straight into the heart of the most squalid

scene ever enacted; not because He pities but because He will not let His own go, if by one supreme act of costly, holy, passionate Love, He may win a free response from one failure. The story of that thief is the story of a million men and women who have cried in the hour of their despair, "Lord, remember me." And the answer of God is the same as the answer of Jesus, He gives more than man dares to ask. "With Me"—those are the words that matter. As for Paradise, well, it begins here and now.

If there be any who feel the need of forgiveness of sin and the knowledge of the Love of God, I can only suggest that they should cry out of their darkness, "Lord, remember me." It will not be in vain. God, said St. Bernard, is never sought in vain, even when we do not find Him.

If there has ever been given to any of us the promise that tells of pardon, and the Vision of God in the face of Jesus Christ, there is also given a commission to forgive by acts as nearly like the acts of Jesus as we can make them. We must bring God's Absolution to others.

Christ's Life of Love within us is to make us His agents in reconciling God to man and man to God. "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." We have always limited these words to those who are set apart for what is known as the priestly office of the confessional. It is the priest, say the faithful, who can alone remit and retain sin. I am quite sure that is not true. Every single follower of our Lord has a share in the remission of sins by his attitude towards those who long for a fresh chance.

Our Lord was the great Believer in men. It was His belief and trust in them that so often helped them to make good. He detested sin, but in loving sinners He gave them fresh courage and hope. He never quenched the smoking flax. He remitted sin by loving sinners. He never retained it by driving them to despair.

"Be ye perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect." What a wonderful faith in man! Our Lord had no illusions about human nature, and yet He always sees men as the children of God. Man is made for Heaven and for God. He greeted him as a brother, and He loved not merely his soul but him. It was once said of the Headmaster of a well-known public school that if he would only stop caring for his pupils' souls and care for them, he would help them more.

Formal confession is, indeed, of great value to some people. I spend a good deal of time suggesting it to some men and dissuading certain women from the practice, and shall so continue until women are permitted to hear the confessions of their own sex. But it is not merely a formal and official pardon pronounced by a man wearing a stole that remits sin, and brings men and women back into the fellowship of Christianity; nor is it the refusal of that pardon that retains them in sin. The act of the humblest and most illiterate Christian disciple can remit, and indeed, it can retain. Our attitude towards sinners either absolves or retains. We are so likely to retain the sin of someone else by our hard and sour face, our lack of understanding, and our distrust of people who, like

ourselves, have made bad mistakes. Whenever we repel by our aloofness and loveless inhumanity, we harden, alienate, and refuse to exercise our God-given function of the remission of sins. We refuse to take part in the absolving Love of Christ. That attitude is not uncommon amongst confident Church people. It was well expressed by an old lady who once said, "I don't want the visitor from the Church coming round saving her soul on me."

Every day we mix with folk who know nothing of the happiness that has come to us since we learned to believe in the Love of God. They are often good people, but it is strange how often for them life has lost its radiance. Whether they will ever see the Lord Christ depends on whether they can see a reflection of His Love in us.

It is a fine and yet terrible thing to be stamped as we are by our own desire with the sign of the Cross. To be within the circle of Christ's disciples gives us infinite power to crucify more completely as Judas did, or to love as completely as Peter did in the end. We can remit sins or retain them, alienate or repel, win or lose.

If we know how to love as our God loved, believing always in the goodness of men, we shall set forth the most compelling picture that the world has ever seen, namely, the picture of Almighty God crucified that He might be alongside of crucified humanity. Who knows whether there may not come even through us to some poor soul out in the wilderness of despair and temptation, the Voice above every other voice that cried "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise"?

CHAPTER IV

"When Jesus therefore saw His Mother and the disciple standing by whom He loved, He saith unto His Mother, 'Woman, behold thy son.' Then saith He to the disciple, 'Behold thy Mother.' And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home."

CHAPTER IV

In pictures and carvings of the Crucifixion our Lord is generally represented as attended by His Mother on one side of the Cross and St. John on the other. There were others there, but these two are chosen as the two whom Jesus loved best on earth and as the two who loved Him best.

It is Mary I want you to think about. Short of superstitious reverence, there is no honour too great for Mary the Mother of Jesus. She is standing now by the Cross doing there what almost every woman would do while her beloved suffered.

Women are much braver than men in the presence of pain. We try to leave the sick-room, they beg to remain. Perhaps it is because they suffer so much more than we do. I wish men realised this more. Anyhow, here Mary is near her Son. Peter might slink away, but not Mary the Mother of Jesus. What does she care for the jeering multitudes? What are the Roman guards to her? Supposing she thought her Son had made a mistake, she would have been there just the same. It is the way of mothers to stand most near to the sons who have not come up to their hopes:

> "If I were damned of body and soul,
> I know whose prayers would make me whole—
> Mother o' Mine."

Jesus looked at her, and then He said to the disciple whom He loved, "Behold thy Mother."

I am always so thankful for that word, it is just what we want and expect. I have always longed in the early days of the Gospel for some more tender phrase towards Mary to be spoken by her Son. Hers was such a hard life. I do not suppose she ever understood Him. Probably no mother ever quite understood her son. He was always moving further and further away, and she following but never quite catching up. Mothers often lose their sons. They draw away on other business, their Father's or their own.

No wonder the days when the Child was wholly dependent on the Mother's care are infinitely precious; I know someone whose son gave his life in the War who treasures his childish rocking-horse as a priest might treasure his altar; and I know another mother in a mean street whose boy gathered all together and went into a far country: she keeps a light burning always at night in the little attic where she was wont to see him asleep in his childish days. A mother's lot is often pitiably hard. No wonder the childhood days of her son or her daughter are set in her heart like a jewel of countless worth. I wonder if Mary treasured in her new home a toy or a carpenter's hammer that her Son once used.

The Gospels make us eager, but they do not tell us half that we want to know. They do not tell us anything like enough about the relationship between Jesus and His Mother. He must have been the perfect son, but you would hardly think it. Of course, those who wrote the Gospels were not writing

what we know as biographies. They were recording reminiscences, and that without any emotion. Such were the circumstances, Jesus said and did this or that—that was unforgettable. In these days we want to know so much about our Lord's humanity. We do not want Him to wear a crown at the carpenter's bench. All sorts of human questions come into our minds. How did He actually spend the day? What did He look like? Did He ever smile and laugh? Are we justified in thinking of Him, as I always do, as the most radiant person of His day in Palestine? The Gospels do not tell us as much as we want. They are dealing with the heavenward side of the Son of God. They do not anticipate the questioning of our day. It is not about a mother's son or a carpenter that they care to speak.

The world of our day has gone out after the Son of Man—the Carpenter. Men and women are hard-pressed to know how to live as Christians within the world. A man with a halo is outside their beat. They want to know how their Ideal once lived. What was His relationship to those He loved and worked with? What sort of work was turned out from the carpenter's bench? Were the yokes He is reported to have made as full of good craftsmanship as the carvings from Oberammergau? And how did He spend His evenings when the day's work was done? Did He tell stories to His little family? He told them so beautifully later and surely that gift did not come to Him only when He wanted illustration for His sermons: and surely to His Mother He must have said so many tender

and beautiful things: we want to hear at least one of them, "Rest awhile, Mother, while I tidy up." "God loves you, Mother." "I cannot bear your suffering, Mother, but one day all shall be clear to you."

Religiously I am but a product of the thought that stirs my own generation, and there have been times when my poor faith has suffered from an unavailing search for some such passage of strong and tender love. It does not satisfy to tell me that He was "obedient" to His parents. And more than that, let me confess it in the presence of friends, what is told seems just a little hard. Even when you have allowed for translation it is rather stern, the result is something that is less than gentle. Those words of our dear Lord to His Mother at the wedding feast at Cana, "What have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." And again, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" And she so anxious and tired in looking for Him Whom she had once carried in dark terror into Egypt after the pains of the lowly stable-bed. And once more those words that must have brought sadness to a mother's heart as she sends in someone to say that she and His brethren are waiting without and gets the answer, "Who is My Mother, and who are My brethren?" I think she must have cried when the words were reported to her. She was a human mother.

I wish the writers of the Gospels had given us but one picture of intimacy between Mother and Son. They must have been so frequent. I wish that they had told us of a visit He had paid to His

home after His work had called Him away. I am sure He went there when He could :

> " And yet I think at Golgotha
> As Jesus' eyes were closed in death,
> They saw with love most passionate
> The village street of Nazareth."

He was the perfect Son, I am certain of that.

He was always just lovely to women, so ahead of His own time that it baffled even His intimates. His attitude towards women has altered their whole position in the world. He makes not one single reference to them that is not respectful and tender. He told a deep secret to one woman who had not been a success. Mary and Martha were His intimates. He had a beautiful sympathy for women. As He went on that last journey to Jerusalem He found time not only to speak those ominous words about the city, but to pity its women folk who were soon to have babies. It is because this amazing sympathy and understanding for the hard lot of women is so plainly implied in the Gospels that I wish Matthew or Mark, Luke or John had sketched for our generation some little picture more lovely between our Lord and His Mother during the time that He moved about among men. But what we really want is found at the end on the Cross.

I don't know why Mary had to be beneath, why, in the name of Providence, she had not died before that dreadful Friday. Why, at least, was it not ordained that she should be absent from Jerusalem just then ? The answer is a question. Would a mother desire to tend her son in his last agony ?

Or would she rather He had died without her? Do you remember the women who went across to France that they might be with their men at the end? Anyhow, Mary was there, and just before the end He came right back to her. He looked at her and all His lovely humanity went out towards her. She must have a home and someone to tend her, and someone, too, who was His friend and with whom she could talk about Him, and so for His mother's sake and for her future needs He makes, as it were, His last will and testament—"Behold thy Son." And from that hour the disciple whom Jesus loved took her into his home. It is said, I know not with what truth, that they lived together for twelve years in Jerusalem, and that St. John refused to leave the city even for the purpose of preaching the Gospel as long as Mary was alive.

There, then, at the end is the human touch we long for. It breaks through the reticence of those who record the story of the Cross. It is an unforgettable incident and infinitely precious to pilgrims like ourselves. It is the proof that He was the kind of son we have always known He was, "Son, behold thy Mother." He would never have asked someone to do what He had neglected to do Himself. She was to have a home; with His dying breath He decreed it. The Father's business did not prevent Him caring as a son should. He was not inhuman.

With us who care for causes, home so often comes last; there we return after our day of hectic good work. We are too tired to be of any service and the minutes of the last meeting must be written up. It could not be supposed from our conduct that

there was any reality in our far-famed public utterances on fellowship, brotherhood and home life. Home is frankly an appendix to work. I hope my daughter may never be married to a man who is an unloving son albeit an earnest Church-worker. God help her if she is. She will lose her faith as well as the golden romance of her marriage day.

One simple lesson I learn from the Third Word on the Cross, and it is that no business, no agonising for the welfare of mankind should ever make a man forget the claims of home. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I am become as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal . . . and though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned and have not love, it profiteth me nothing"—and charity, that is love, begins at home. These words might, indeed, be graven on the hearts of all men, but I would have them written in gold on the hearts of those who spend their lives in the service of everyone except perhaps of those of their own household and of their own kith and kin. There are, alas, a hundred people who will join a society for ameliorating the lot of the unfortunate to one who will specialise on the tender care of those who are peculiarly his own.

From the agony of the Cross, Jesus says much that is profound. This Third Word is within the understanding of all who have ears to hear. It is the part and test of a noble life that it does not neglect its nearest and its best. If your work for humanity is praised of men but never an echo of its beauty is heard behind your own front door,

then do not give up your service any more than Jesus did, but for God's sake let it fall like a blessing across the path where your own must walk.

"Almighty and loving Father, give us more power and grace to be tender and thoughtful to those whom Thou hast especially committed to our care. Give us understanding, wider sympathy and more patience that we may make our home happier for those who live with us, that they may catch a glimpse of Thy love which was divinely human, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

CHAPTER V

"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

CHAPTER V

It has never been easy to accept the truth of the Christian revelation, and the difficulties of faith have always been up to the limit of human endurance. Those who teach otherwise are doing religion a grave disservice. If it is a God-given gift to possess a simple and an unquestioning faith, it is still more God-given by the addition of sympathy to have won a faith that has been fought for in dark places. It is a sufficiency of light that we really need, and for many of us there will never be on this side of the grave more than this. Few of us are overwhelmingly persuaded on any Damascus road. At the end of our search for the kind of God that we care to love and trust there will still be times of grave perplexity.

If we are seeking a religion that will be doubt-proof, we are seeking a "will-o'-the-wisp." So many despair because they think there must be something wrong with them since from time to time they find it almost impossible to believe in a God that loves. I wish they knew that nearly all the lovers of our Lord have had their moments of dark despair. It is faith and not lack of it that asks questions. Thou who seek shall find a sufficiency of light. He cannot make Himself known to those who will not ask and seek and knock. These alone are outside.

TWO DAYS BEFORE

" When Jesus came to Golgotha
They hanged Him on a tree;
They drave great nails through hands and feet
And made a Calvary.
They crowned Him with a Crown of Thorns,
Red were His wounds and deep,
For those were crude and cruel days,
And human flesh was cheap.

" When Jesus came to Westminster,
They simply past Him by,
They did not touch a hair of Him,
They simply let Him die.
For men had grown more tender,
And they would not give Him pain—
They only just passed down the street
And left Him in the rain.

" Still Jesus cried, ' Forgive them, for they know not what they do,'
And still it rained the winter rain that drenched Him through and through.
The crowd went home and left the street without a soul to see,
And Jesus crouched against a wall and cried for Calvary."

The men who come to revile may stay to bless, but Calvary itself has no chance with those who will not question. Over against the present discouragement of what is called " the religious situation " there is this at least to be glad about. There are probably more people asking questions than ever before in the world's history.

We were foolish, of course, to think, as we once did, that war was to bring a revival of real religion. It is a merciful thing that it did not, for if it needed a general massacre to fill churches, what an argument could be added to the already overstocked armoury of the militarists. War is a destructive curse. I

wonder even now if we realise it. War is hell upon earth, and men and their women-folk who have been in hell cannot be expected to have had there much useful teaching about God.

As a matter of fact, most of us have unlearned a lot about God. We have thrown away much that was true with much that was untrue. It is well for this generation to remember the words of Father Tyrrell, "When you are changing the wine from one chalice to the other, see that some of it is not spilt." Men came back from the War, gallant and brave as before, but for the most part stripped of the little faith that once was theirs. And the Churches failed to give them what they lacked—and for one reason, they were and are inhuman. The charge that can with most justice be brought against organised religion is not that the Churches are teaching what is untrue, or only partially true, but that they are teaching what is true in an altogether inhuman and unlovely way.

Directly after the Armistice the vast majority of demobilised men and women dropped into their own church or chapel to see if they could "stick" it. They have not been able to, and it is not altogether their fault. It is the professionalism of the officials who control Churches quite as much as clericalism that has brought about this unhappy state of affairs. And then five years passed—years of but poor achievement, until to-day this fact is haunting humanity, "Without God there is no hope." And thoughtful people turn wistfully to the Church—where else should they turn? And they see not one Church but a hundred warring sects, and those,

so it would seem, busily engaged in building barriers, not against Anti-Christ, but against one another. And so the world goes on songless and unsanctified.

If your faith is settled once and for all, and you have chosen its institutional expression, do for pity's sake remember how the warring of the Churches bolts and bars the door against the people who desire to pass through to the sanctuary. Religiously, our generation, is rather like folk who have lost something for which they are unwilling to give up the search. Men cannot believe, and yet they cannot disbelieve. Around the festivals they throng the churches. They will not leave the old memorials of their one-time faith. They cannot completely draw away from the places where they expect their questionings still to be answered. They cannot settle down to a world of belief, nor to a world from which belief is banished. They still stand in the Garden where the Tomb lies. If only we could show them the living Lord and the marks of the Lord Jesus!

But there is hope. At least men have faith enough to ask questions. And we who are within institutional religion are asking questions too. The world has now passed out of clerical control. No longer will it accept an assertion merely because it is official and authoritative: but it will still seek the truth from the lips of any Christian, whether he owes allegiance to a Church or not, whose life is shot through with a beauty that he can connect with the love of Jesus Christ. Jesus has no rival. He is real, not because of any official status that Christendom has given Him, but simply because

He is what He is. He who knows Him well enough to make Him known will never lack a following.

And what are we to say to those who ask? Surely we may first tell them that we ourselves are often still out in the wilderness of doubt and uncertainty. That He Whom we call Lord and Master still often goes ahead where we cannot follow. If He always in the end seems to come back, yet He is often away a very long time. I think we might add that He, too, was once down in the depths—in agonies in the Garden of Gethsemane; in agonies on the Cross. For the comfort of the world that cry comes out of the depths, not one word of it will we ever attempt to explain away: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

We have heard a good deal lately about creating a world fit for heroes. Spiritually that world already exists. It is not a world now that has much of a welcome for cowards. As Professor Jacks says, "In the breast of every man there is both a coward and a hero," and only the hero can live gladly in this present life. It is the interpretation of facts—not the facts themselves—that is the more important. Religion is that which develops the hero at the expense of the coward. Our Lord cried always for heroes, for men who would dare and adventure, He always suggested that it was only by going right down into the darkness that we could get through to the light. "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" is followed by, "Father, into Thy Hands I commend My Spirit."

There is a graphic picture drawn in the tenth chapter of St. Mark when the little group of timid,

questioning disciples, with their Master at their head, is going up on that last fateful journey to Jerusalem. The end is near and the party is discouraged. The darkness is gathering and sorrow has already fallen on the hearts of His friends. Their Master is moving before them a little ahead and they begin to wonder, and as they follow they begin to be afraid. He is striding on, and they would fain hold back. Yet they follow; and that is the point. There is no one else to follow. This is a man's ideal. If in your loud questioning you have searched the wisdom of the world and never seen anything more Godlike than Jesus Christ, then follow—follow into the darkness and then to Calvary, and then to the Tomb. Follow with your mind as well as with your heart, and as you follow keep company with the Spirit Whom you pursue. I think your quest will not be in vain. It has been said that if all the puzzled people would give up the attempt to explain Christ and devote the next year to following Him, at the end of that time they would know more about Him than they had ever known before, and they would have put Christianity in a position to conquer the world.

As we follow we may well be afraid, for we have to "follow Him a long way and into many a dark place. We shall have to follow, not merely down the road that leads by the side of a quiet lane, but into the Garden of Gethsemane and up to the Cross and beyond the Tomb to a victory over life."

Surely this is a hero's pilgrimage, and it is likely that on the way there will be wrung from our lips the cry that Jesus was not ashamed to utter, "My

God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" That does not matter. What does matter is that He should see us afraid, amazed indeed, but following. To those who are thus daring Christ will return. "A little while and ye shall not see Me, and again a little while and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father."

> "O human soul, as long as thou canst so
> Set up a mark of everlasting light,
> Above the howling senses' ebb and flow,
> To cheer thee and to right thee if thou roam,
> Not with lost toil thou labourest through the night,
> Thou mak'st the heaven thou hop'st indeed thy home'

Jesus said, "I am the Light of the World."

CHAPTER VI

"I Thirst."

CHAPTER VI

I DARE not say much about physical pain. I understand so little about it. I have had my small share of suffering, and I am sure it has never done the part of me that counts any harm, but to see others in pain has been a dreadful trial to faith. I know nothing quite so intolerable as to stand by some loved one and to feel impotent to heal, either by prayer or by physic. I think that our prayers about the physical suffering of our friends are often ill-advised. It were better, I think, to spend more time praying not for an end of their pain, but for strength for them to bear it nobly.

Jesus suffered the agonies of physical pain, and more than that, He was not ashamed to call upon someone to alleviate the suffering. I always look on the doctor and the nurse with the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, as the most powerful representatives of Christ. I have seen His Spirit more plainly in the sick-room than anywhere else, and of all the noblest people on God's earth, there are none more noble than those who bear their pain with consistent courage.

On the Cross Jesus suffered, and He said so. "I thirst." "Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar, and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth." In those

days it was a sign of weakness to confess to pain, and there are some to-day who deny its existence. But pain as a matter of actual fact is as real as sin. Since it hurts us horribly, Jesus was not likely to avoid a similar suffering. Only with Him it came last. It was the last thing to be thought about. When everything was done, the crucifiers forgiven, the poor criminal remembered, the Mother cared for, then the Son of Man said quietly—" I thirst."

The Saviour of the world was no ascetic, no dream-haunted absentee from paths that we poor folk must tread. He passed our way and found it rougher than we do. His lesson is, not how to die, but how to live that death may be but the gate that opens into a fuller life. Hunger and thirst had been His portion when the Son of Man had not where to lay His head. Only these things were not suffered to hold Him back from the Father's business. He took them in His stride, but owned that they hurt. He never went round His trials, but through them, and there is all the difference in the world between the two methods of meeting suffering. When He suffered and said that He suffered, He did not pray for miraculous deliverance, but out of the grandeur of His own soul, and with the assistance of a friend, He dealt with the lesser evil of pain that had come to Him as He pursued the Father's way.

I remember a sergeant in France, as noble a Christian as I ever met, stopping for a moment in the front line of trenches to have his hand bandaged before he went on again. There was time for a joke while the bandage was being wound round his

broken hand. I remember at the time, in the confused way in which we thought in France, seeing something of what pain meant to our Lord, in this picture of a muddy soldier. "It hurts like hell," but it never once occurred to him that it should hold him back from his purpose.

It is wonderful how often to those who have eyes to see there are human scenes that reflect the diviner ones of the Day of Calvary.

Let me give you another example that has often made me think of Christ. During the War the Oxford Settlement in Bethnal Green was naturally deserted by its workers, who were fighting in France. One man was left who had been there for years, an old Oxford blue and a man of brilliant intellect. He had given up his own fair prospects to be of humble service to his fellow-men in East London. He was considerably over fifty, and he found himself almost alone at the Settlement with the work that required over twenty men for its doing. He shouldered the whole burden and soon his eyesight gave in. The doctors told him that one eye must be taken out. With hardly a word to a soul he went to the hospital one Monday morning, had his eye out and was back again at work on Tuesday afternoon. Thus Christ still passes through the world.

Pain is hateful. It is to be alleviated whenever possible, but it is not to be permitted to become the master of life. Man has been taught not in word, but in action, that suffering when it is met by faith and courage does bring to the soul a certain fellowship with the Divine life. There were four

lines which Carlyle translated from Goethe and loved to repeat :

> " Who never ate his bread in sorrow,
> Who never spent the midnight hours
> Weeping and waiting for the morrow,
> He knows You not, ye Heavenly Powers."

The sufferer knows in the presence of the Crucified that there is an unseen world throbbing with sympathy. The mystery of suffering remains. A disciple of Christ does not suffer less than others. But he is not left paralysed by despair. He can do something. In the fellowship of the crucified Captain of his salvation he can make the world richer for all he has to endure. There can be more of God in the world because of the pure faith and unwearying patience with which he challenges the darkness.

> " Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag,
> And smile, smile, smile,"

is good Christianity as well as common sense. It suggests that suffering shall not be allowed to curtail the carrying through of the adventure for which the bag was packed.

Our Lord's entry through pain into death is the most glorious epic in history. He goes into it with the flags flying, and because of His triumph He has made death different from what it ever was before. Death had once worn the stamp of sin and of God's anger. It had seemed like the entry of a criminal into the dock to receive a sentence untempered by

charity and mercy—just, maybe, dreadfully, cruelly just. Here is One that walks through into glory, and the pain of His passage is but a setting of triumph. Service that stops at pain, or that pain can stop, is of little worth. Now no longer can we look on pain as the result of sin, or deride it as not existing. Now no longer can we suffer it to darken our homes, or its recital weary our friends, or its power to thwart the purpose of God.

And one more thought: in His suffering Christ gave an opportunity to one who had possibly helped to nail Him to the Cross to provide the only touch of charity we see in these hours of man's brutality. As once before He lifted the poor woman by the well from the meanness of her life by causing her to satisfy His thirst, so here He weaves into the Gospel story the tale of one rough soldier who knew how to answer the cry of a heart in pain.

In Our Lord's picture of the Day of Judgment one amazing fact stands out: those who are welcomed are but the people who have done those "little nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love," as Wordsworth calls them, "that are the best portion of a good man's life." Jesus says these things are decisive. They reveal what is in the heart of man. "Lord, when saw we Thee in hunger, or thirsty, and gave Thee meat or drink? We do not remember it." And the Judge seems to say, "No, you wouldn't. These were things done out of your heart, not acts of charity so much as the forgotten by-products of hearts that were on fire with love—inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of these ye have done it unto Me."

Wherever in the world to-day can be heard the pathos of that human cry, "I thirst," there is Christ,—on the kerb-stone, in the office, or the home. That cry sounds loud from people who hunger the world over. How the Christ must long to see here one and here another taking up their bed of suffering and walking out towards the cry—not waiting for the angel to come down and trouble the pool. How He must long to see a few more of us step out of the crowd, even though companions think it foolish, and give what we can in answer to the cry of a suffering world, "I thirst."

CHAPTER VII

"It is finished."

CHAPTER VII

It is hard for us to know the intonation with which these words of the dying Christ were spoken. If they came as the sufferer's sigh of relief, they must also have been the worker's glad cry of achievement. Everything had been done that could be. Man had been offered a sight of God as He really was. For those of us who believe that in seeing Jesus we see God, the Cross is not a coarse framework of blood-stained wood, but the most precious emblem of man's dearest hopes. Set in the background of Easter Day it is the great pledge which we so sorely need, that love is stronger than hate, grace than sin, life than death.

> "Though the cause of evil prosper
> Yet 'tis truth alone is strong,
> Though her portion be the scaffold
> And upon the throne be wrong—
> Yet that scaffold sways the future,
> And behind the dim Unknown
> Standeth God within the shadow,
> Keeping watch above His own."

God came the whole way to let us know that, and the Cross was the noblest and most glorious emblem of a rout that was turned into a victory.

I cannot bear the ordinary Crucifix, especially those turned out by our so-called ecclesiastical art

shops, and there is no picture of the Crucifixion that I care to look at save one in the Louvre, where the dear face is hidden in shadow. In Amiens Cathedral there is a very old carving which represents the Figure of Christ; He wears a robe and a royal diadem. His arms are extended as though to embrace the whole world, but no longer are the hands and feet nailed to the tree. Christ is reigning here and yet reigning from the Cross. It is this Christ from Whose lips I hear the victorious words, "It is finished."

Mr. H. G. Wells says something like this in *God, the Invisible King.*

> "The symbol of the Crucifixion, the drooping, pain-drenched Figure of Christ . . . these things just jar with our spirit. We little men may well fail and repent, but it is our faith that God does not fail us nor Himself. Our Crucifix, if you must have a Crucifix, would show God with a hand or foot already torn away from its peg, and with eyes not downcast, but resolute against the sky—a face without pain. Pain lost and forgotten in the surpassed glory of the struggle and the inflexible will to live and prevail. . . .
>
> "A Christianity which shows for its daily symbol Christ risen and trampling victoriously upon a broken cross would be far more in the spirit of our worship."

The Crucifix on which we so often gaze only tells us half of what has been done for us. It is an insufficient symbol of the Christian faith. The task

before those who would portray Christ is to show Him reigning because of the Cross. What was once the dark instrument of death that cast its shadow on the whole of Calvary now throws its glory over the whole earth to lighten the dark night of despair and sin. A Cross on which there is no Figure may be a truer reminder of what Christ did than a Crucifix that tells always of pain and death.

While He is still on the Cross Christ says, "It is finished." What is finished? What does it mean actually to us that He said, "It is finished"? I have never thought that our Lord was referring to His own suffering. I have always thought the "It" referred to something that was holding me. I could imagine a father saying the same to his son on the morning that, after a long term in prison, he was allowed once more to join himself to his fellow-men. The boy is free now—free, if he so cares, to make good and to live once more in the company of free men. He could fall back into the old grooves, or in the new life he could be born again. The way is not clear, but it is open.

I have read many books on the Atonement, and yet I cannot tell you much about it. I only know as the surest thing in the world that because Christ suffered I can love God, and because He came down to my level I have the power to rise towards His. If you love Jesus you are glad that He chose the Cross. It is more like Him than anything else He ever did. You will acknowledge, too, that in your case it has been effective, though you will stumble when you try to explain the how and why. The

whole question that the Cross asks and answers is simply this: Will a man take Jesus at His word and commit himself to God? Will he hazard that the values of God are what Jesus said they were? These values are seen on the Cross.

Our Master taught that he who would be in the Kingdom of God must be the servant of all, and that although goodness, beauty, truth and humility can be crucified, they must inevitably rise again. It is a matter for us of experiment rather than argument. The man who will venture not half-way but the whole in daring to accept the new values of God will know that he was justified in his adventure.

Jesus said all sorts of lovely things would happen to those who would end the old and begin the new. The son would be home again and the father would cry, "He was lost and is found. Let us be merry." The son is now more God's than ever, just as a sheep that had been lost would be of greater value than one that had never strayed from home.

I have been over the world and have spent much time in watching people pursue happiness which all the while was by their side, or rather in their hearts for the bringing out. I have never met any as happy as those who have set out to prove that when God promised power to all who would be born again into the spirit of service, He said what He was perfectly able to carry out and by some grace indefinable that flows like a blessing from Calvary.

All this I hear as Jesus says from the Cross,

"It is finished." Those words seem to imply, "And now it is up to you to begin. Those chains that hold you, test them, they cannot hold you any longer. That restless soul of yours that is always wanting you know not what—it was made for me. My peace I give unto you—if only you will take it." "It is finished" is the worker's cry of achievement which will be mocked at always by those who are unwilling to test its truth. Our moral difficulties come long before our intellectual ones. They are much the harder of the two. It is harder to forget self than to believe in miracles or repeat a Creed. Just before the darkness of death settles down, Christ tells us that He has set at liberty those that are bound and opened the road to the adventurous and unafraid.

There is no prospect ahead of us more glorious than the sense of comradeship with a great leader in a great crusade for the welfare of mankind. That is Christ's offer, and because He has made it, here one and here another join themselves to His company and find the road hard indeed, but infinitely worth while.

In *The Pilgrim's Progress* the story of the Atonement is well translated: "By what they say I perceive that he had been a great Warrior and had fought with and slain him that had the power of death, but not without great danger to himself, which made me love him the more."

CHAPTER VIII

"FATHER, INTO THY HANDS I COMMEND MY SPIRIT."

CHAPTER VIII

These words, like the fourth saying from the Cross, are a quotation from the Psalms. Jewish children used them in their evening prayers. They were saying them, no doubt, on the evening of the Crucifixion. While the smoke of the evening sacrifice goes up Jesus says the same words in His last evening prayer. All through the three hours of His agony He is in spirit doing what His enemies dared Him. He is coming down from the Cross to be near to His own.

In the life of our Lord there is a strange blending of the lowly and the majestic. At His birth He was laid in a manger, while out on the pastures of Bethlehem angels sang His praises. Long afterward He was asleep in a boat and so overcome with fatigue that He had to be wakened to realise His danger, but immediately He rebuked the winds and the waves and there was a great calm. When He saw the grief of Mary and Martha He wept good human tears before He raised their brother to life again. Here in His last moments He is saying the simple prayer of a child, yet He was prefacing it with the word that lifted it to a plane of glory. "Father," He said, "into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

Is it not strange that though I have seen many die in war and in peace I have never yet heard a man or a woman with their last prayer utter the word "Father"? Jesus called God "Father" in the sunny days of the Galilean life, and He called Him "Father" at the beginning and end of His agony. Since Jesus lived God is to man a nearer and a lovelier Being. Father—that is the word that comes out of the darkness of Calvary.

I have sadly failed in preaching Christ if I have not allowed you to see that the glad news of to-day is about God. The Cross is not an isolated fact in history to weep about, and to be thought about in barren admiration. It is the revelation of what God is and is like. It is a living and actual presentation of the character of God or it is very little else.

That which holds many men to-day away from God is that they have been too often the victims of a veritable caricature of God—which, alas! our present Prayer-Book in certain places does a good deal to encourage.

The war did not produce this false God—it brought Him into the open. Mr. Britling said, "Our sons have shown us God," and it is true in the sense that it is unthinkable that God should be less lovable than those who without a murmur laid down their lives for their brethren.

But all the while and down the ages against our false conception of God has stood the Cross of Calvary, and on it has hung Jesus Christ, and He has cried "Father" until you would think there is

not a soul who had not heard, and yet even nominal Christians still have no idea of linking the name of God with the blessed name Father. We need so much to think religion through again in terms of that word and, still more, we Christians need to act as if it were true.

Jesus taught the Fatherhood of God; yes, but He wasn't always preaching it—He was living it out.

Christianity began not with an argument made, but an act done and a deed accomplished. There was a time in the ministry of Jesus when He stood silent before Pilate. The hour of speech was over —it remained to do.

Carlyle's accusation against civilisation that it had run to seed in talking is still true. There are a hundred noble orations to one noble act. All this has no application to the birth of Christianity. Something worth talking about was furnished before the talking began.

In the Cross I glory because of one word spoken at the beginning and one word at the end which is commended to me because of the life that lived it out. If we could live out that belief in God we could bring in the Kingdom. It is a hard task and a difficult truth to believe, but I vow I can try and I can believe enough to test it, because to-day once again I have seen the loveliest life that was ever presented going down into death and with these brave words, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

There is only one way in which the truth or falsity of any creed can be tested, and that is by trying

whether we can live up to it and seeing what happens.

> "Tho' love repine and reason chafe,
> There came a voice without reply—
> 'Tis man's perdition to be safe
> When for the Truth he ought to die."

I would love it if any who read these simple words could go on their way with new courage and new hope, and the word "Father" ringing in their ears.

Remember this old world spiritually is a world fit only for heroes, that is, for men and women who will dare to go through the shadows until the day breaks.

It is no world for those who will allow the coward within them to triumph over the hero. You cannot preserve a living faith with any slogan of "Safety first."

There is an old Jewish legend which tells that Satan was once asked what it was he missed most since he had fallen from his high estate in heaven. "I miss most of all," said he, "the trumpets that are sounded every morning." I know just what that means.

The one thing we need to learn, if life is to be glorious and Christlike, is the sound of the trumpets in the morning, calling us to let the hero within us get the better of the coward.

There is nothing in life so worth while as to ride out in happy valiancy with Christ for God and love's sake, blundering in where angels fear to tread, by the love of Christ making glad the heart of man

on his pilgrimage, binding up hearts that are broken, and standing by those who are halting lest they may need the hand stretched out to lead them to the Kingdom.

Not preaching but practice is what is wanted. The trumpets sound in the morning not for preaching but for practising and for testing the prayer of the night and the hour before.

"Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

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